

Dear Students, Colleagues and Friends,

The air seemed to be sucked out of the room as I read the bios of my co-panelists. Michelle Thaller from NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center, Terry Vogt of the Global Footprint Network, Richard Alley, Evan Pugh Professor of Geosciences at Pennsylvania State University and author of [Earth: The Operators' Manual](#), Julie Brigham-Grette, chair of the Polar Research Board of the U.S. National Academy of Science, and Bill Rees the bio-ecologist and ecological economist who originated and co-developed the ecological footprint analysis with his student Mathis Wackernagel.

"Blown away" doesn't begin to cover it.

We had all come together at the invitation of the University of Colorado-Boulder for their Annual Conference of World Affairs where we would discuss an array of topics from our personal fields of study to art, literature, technology and global social challenges. As an example, my first panel was a discussion on the death penalty including alongside Pulitzer prize-winning Miami Herald columnist and author, Leonard Pitts. Others found themselves with equally towering companions.

But for all the headiness of this company of experts, that is not what struck me at this gathering. What did strike me was, to a person, all of them agreed we have passed the limits of what Earth can support.

I am accustomed to much smaller stages and much less fame in my environs. Yet, here they were – each saying we were beyond the edge, if not quite to the point of calamity. They were saying it calmly, a fact which carried an eerie quality of its own. They each brought a few messages of hope (some more than others); but they all had the same question and concern: How do we capture the public's attention and get them to make changes? Now?

How do you do that?

My answer is in my work; but as importantly if not more so, through the newsletters and essays I send to you. Many of you are taking actions needed to help stem calamity by working to build circular processes meshing waste integration into both industrial and community work. Some of you are implementing biomimicry. Others are educating children about sustainability and how they can take positive action. You're building sustainability organizations to help communities change. You're restoring prairies and watersheds. You're embracing the use of native plants and integrating food and floral harvesting into your workplace landscaping.

Good on you, mates!

Now that we've patted ourselves on the back, let's ask the most important question.

"What more can I do?"

As I reflect on my own behaviors to that end, I recognize I strive to strike a balance between invigorating action and inspiring the fear sometimes accompanying the delivery of truth. However as I've watched climate change as well as water quality and supply continually politicized and the "planet" and "people" legs of the *triple bottom line* bow to the "profit" element, I am brought to question the gracious, simply informational side of my approach.

The other end of the spectrum "angry radicalism" holds no allure for me and seldom engages the regular citizens I seek to include. Nonetheless, it is important to understand that *both ends* of the bell curve of activism are sometimes the best course of action – sometimes suing, sometimes inviting opponents to lunch. I've settled somewhere in the middle at "urgent honesty". I read an [article](#) this week on the plight of the Laysan albatross and photographer/filmmaker Chris Jordan's struggle with the same predicament.

I remember albatrosses fondly as the subject of bird classes I used to teach to elementary students. At one point in the class I would ask a student up to the front of the class to hold a four inch pre-cut paper representing an average Ruby-throated hummingbird's wingspan. I would then ask four students to come up behind that student and spread out their arms touching fingers across the front of the class to

represent the wingspan of the Wandering albatross. Gasps of wonder with background talking surging louder preceded the dozens of questions they asked at once. Such is the impact of the unseen but broad-winged albatross.

Imagine then, if you will, Chris's struggle as he kneeled on the gravel shore of Midway atoll to photograph the Wanderer's dead Laysan cousins, wings and bodies decomposing to reveal stomachs full of plastic - remnants of our everyday lives. Our lack of intentional living, or worse, our disregard for them and other living things caused these gritty deaths and profound grief for Chris as he shot frame after frame.

Like my co-panelists back in Colorado, he too struggled - searching for a balance between despair and hope – when neither alone has brought us the recognition and action we require to make positive change. For me, that urgent honesty is what guides these newsletters to your screen. If we care anything for other creatures or even our own lives and peace of mind, we must act, act daily and constantly bring others on board to do similarly. We cannot simply take actions without alerting others. Such commitment won't grow our effects to the critical mass necessary for change . . . and change enough to make a difference. This is true whether we are working to stop plastic garbage from reaching the ocean or rusty lawn chairs from lounging in an urban stream. It is valid whether we are tackling climate change by trapping CO₂ or methane. It is required as we communicate our needs to politicians. It is what makes a difference as we nurture monarch populations back to health.

Rebuilding what we have torn asunder is arduous work best accomplished with friends and partners. We must examine the communication/action continuum for ourselves to see where and how we can make a difference – and assemble a powerful flock of people to birth change where bird bones once lay.

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In this season of thanks, I thank you for the difference you are making whether it's applying biomimicry in the U.K. and Iceland or planting natives in your own back yard. Whatever you're doing – thank you . . . and please, invite others to join you.

Best to you and our whole world too,

Margo

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Give good people good information and they'll do good things.

(If you've just received this single newsletter, it may be because I thought you'd be interested in this particular subject. You may or may not get others. If you want on my list regularly, e-mail me. If you want off my list, e-mail me. Thanks!)